

THE VOICE OF FEMINITY BETWEEN THE TWO WORLDS

IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF BHARATI MUKHERJEE

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ABSTRACT

The theme of Femininity in Indian womanhood in the fictional world of Bharati Mukherjee is concentrated on the emotional sphere of women and their responses to the world around them. The consciousness of the changed times on the one hand and the socio-cultural mores and values that have assigned to them a definite role on the other, have led to the fragmentation of the psyche in the contemporary Indian woman. Unlike her counterpart of the past, the woman of today is intensely aware of her familial and societal position: This article studies *The Voice of Femininity between the Two Worlds*. The role assigned to women in the tradition-bound Indian society is contrary to the sophisticated life-style they encounter in the American world.

KEYWORDS: Indian Womanhood, Emotional Sphere of Women, Socio-Cultural & Voice of Femininity

INTRODUCTION

This paper thus, justifies that the main characters in Bharati Mukherjee novels grappled with the challenge of accommodating the American feminist culture into their traditional Indian one. But, as schools of thoughts go, these two concepts are incompatible. The conventional role assigned to women in India is the very antithesis of what the American feminists espouse. Bharati Mukherjee's female of sensitivity and sensibility, Bharati Mukherjee portrays a wide spectrum of contemporary Indian woman belonging to characters are real, modern and life-like. They are typical representatives of the young women particularly of The Third World countries, who at first cherished the dream of immigrating to America for higher education and higher wages, and then after arrival there, aspire to settle there permanently. Their situations and the difficulties they face are also realistically portrayed. In nearly, all stories there is a fixed pattern. In the first part of each story, the focus is on narrating the situation of an immigrant who is in the process of immigration or settling down and in the second part the protagonist is invariably given to making love with a partner of the opposite sex who is rooted in the American soil. Caught between tradition and modernity, they need to redefine themselves and their place in the family and the society. The preamble of the term 'alienation' by Karl Marx in the last decade of the Nineteenth Century has been invigorated in the mid-Twentieth Century with the progression of migration to America which has reached the new high in terms of émigré populace. Bharati Mukherjee is an investigative pioneer of innovative terrains, practices, and literatures co-existent with her wide-ranging mission to discover new worlds.

Woman has been the focus of many literary works down the centuries. One cannot easily ignore the Indian woman in an age of alienation and identity crisis. With their characteristics different ages, classes, and spheres in her varied roles as daughter, wife, grandmother, and breadwinner of the family. Bharati Mukherjee transports the readers from the East to the West to understand the plight and predicament of the immigrant Indians. No attempt has been made so far to

make a comprehensive study about the treatment of the basic issue of alienation in her novels. Hence, the scope of this chapter centers round Indian women. In the pages that follow an attempt is made to analyze the Indian woman who feels distanced from the native soil and hanker to be back and breathe the native air. The characters in the five novels find themselves shuttled between two worlds--the one they leave and the other they aspire to enter.

Bharati Mukherjee's portrayal of women in her novels takes into account the complexity of life, different cultures and different structures of values, in the socio-cultural situation. Bharati Mukherjee has reworked the study of feminism in her writings. The network of female world comes to readers only in Bharati Mukherjee's novels but also in her collections of Short Stories. She advocates many facets of feminism encompassing agitation for equal opportunity, sexual autonomy and right of self-determination.

This paper, captioned as the Voice of Feminity between the Two Worlds, focuses on cultural shock experienced by the female protagonists of Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* and *Jasmine*. This chapter deals with the problem of loss of culture encountered by Dimple and Jasmine. And also it deals with their effects to assume a new identity in the United States. When Dimple in *Wife* leaves her own culture, the old values come into conflict with a new one, triggering a cultural shock.

Both *Wife* and *Jasmine* chronicle the journeys of two young women to the United States for different reasons, under dissimilar circumstances. Both of them pass through torturous physical, mental and emotional agony affecting their whole being to such an extent that they are driven to violence. Bharati Mukherjee articulates her voice through the women characters, who, caught between two worlds, the one they left behind and other they have come to, don't raise their voice and find it difficult to find anchorage in the new world.

Bharati Mukherjee's first novel *The Tiger's Daughter*, is about Tara, born in Calcutta, schooled in New York, and married to David, an American Society, and love in consequence is portrayed as rootless. The novel projects vividly the experience of the protagonist Tara, who is on a visit to Calcutta after a span of seven years abroad. She, however, cannot help wondering if Calcutta could still be home for her. *The Tiger's Daughter* shows the growing awareness of Tara, of her foreignness of spirit, and her eventual realization that her future does not lie in her native land but in America.

In *The Holder of the World* Bharati Mukherjee spins an absorbing story, full of the drama and spectacle of the 17th century being lustily colonized and raided, amidst racial and religious tensions that seem eerily contemporary. As an American writer of Indian origin, Bharati Mukherjee has written an interesting account of the colonial experiences from a western perspective. *The Holder of the World*, portrays the sense of belongingness and cultural alienation through its two central characters Beigh and Hannah. What emerges is an account of India, a country of racial conflict, religious tension, rigid caste system and blind beliefs. This novel also portrays Bhakmati the dedicated servant, an Indian entity embracing, however unwillingly the values of the ruling white class, but ultimately paying price for it.

Bharati Mukherjee's latest novel, *Desirable Daughters* takes up the issues of culture, identity and family loyalty. This is a story of three sisters Tara, Padma and Parvati who are born into a wealthy Brahmin family of Calcutta, presided over by their doting father and his traditionalist mother. Intelligent and artistic, the girls are nevertheless constrained by a society with little regard for women. Their subsequent rebellion leading them to different directions, to different continents, and through different circumstances strains yet strengthens their relationship. Tara finds herself years later away from her homeland raising her son as a single mother in California while one sister is still in India and the other settled in New Jersey.

The preceding pages reveal that the protagonist in all her novels is a woman and an expatriate and the development of the plot is achieved by the device of journey from one country and cultural milieu to another. The experiences of the women characters are used in all these, novels as testing ground for understanding the crux of all expatriate agony and estrangement from one's essential being" Cast against this common background, the three heroines Tara, Dimple and Jasmine tread totally different courses in life.

CONCLUSIONS

All the novels by Bharati Mukherjee revolve around women. The critics are driven to conclude, to borrow a quote from Carlyle with regard to Shakespearean Romantic Comedies that Bharati Mukherjee has only heroines and no heroes. The question that defies answer is that while the protagonist in all the major novels are Indian women Hannah a white woman has been as one of the heroines of *The Holder of the World*. A woman is a woman whether Indian or American. It is her mental makeup that counts. Born in Massachusetts, Hannah travels to India and gets involved with a few Indian lovers. According to Bharati Mukherjee an immigrant's life is nothing but a series of re-incarnations. He lives through many lives during a single life time as stated about the life of an immigrant.

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